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SUBJECT: NINETEEN PARTIES REGISTERED FOR 2007 ELECTIONS;  
RYZHKOVA'S REPUBLICANS OUT

REF: MOSCOW 12042

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns: 1.4 (b,d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) The Federal Registration Service (FRS) has completed its inspection of the 35 political parties that filed for re-registration according to the new, more stringent requirements of the amended electoral law. A FRS representative at an October 26 press conference reported that sixteen of their number had failed to meet the new standards and had not been re-registered. According to the law, by January 1, 2007, those sixteen must either register as NGOs or public organizations or cease to exist. Several smaller parties are choosing to merge with larger, registered parties in order to remain in the political fray. Among the parties not registered was Duma Deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov's Republican Party of Russia (RPS). After the FRS's announcement, Ryzhkov declared that his RPS was being "persecuted." An RPR member responsible for shepherding RPS's application through the registration process admitted that his party's supporting documents were flawed and noted that internal disarray among "democratic" parties, not the FRS, remained the biggest stumbling block. End summary.

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Who Was Registered, Who Not  
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¶2. (U) The Federal Registration Service (FRS) announced at an October 26 press conference that only 19 of the 35 political parties applying for re-registration under the amended, more stringent electoral law had passed muster and would be able to contend for power in the March 2007 regional elections and subsequent, State Duma elections. According to the amended law, political parties are required to have national memberships of at least 50 thousand and register regional party organizations of 500 members of more in at least one-half of Russia's regions. Those failing to do so, must re-register as public organizations, movements, or NGOs; or cease to exist.

¶3. (U) Nineteen political parties will be eligible to participate in the March 2007 regional and December 2007 State Duma elections. Among those registered are:

- United Russia (YR)
- the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF)
- Rodina
- the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
- Yabloko
- the Union of Right Forces (SPS)

- the Agrarian Party of Russia
- Sergey Baburin's "Peoples Will"
- Gennadiy Gudkov's "Peoples Power"
- Gennadiy Seleznev's "Revival of Russia"
- the Russian Party of Life
- the Russian Party of Pensioners
- the Party of Social Justice
- the Democratic Party of Russia
- Free Russia
- Peace and Unity
- the United Socialist Party
- the Patriots of Russia
- the Green Party

¶4. (SBU) Experts here assert that the number of registered parties should continue to drop, as the smaller parties merge in order to compete for representation in the regional and national legislatures. (The first such merger occurred October 28, when the Russian Party of Life, Rodina, and the Russian Party of Pensioners merged (septel) to form the "A Just Russia" party.) Gennadiy Gudkov's "Peoples Party" is reportedly negotiating a merger with the Party of Social Justice and the Patriots of Russia.

¶5. (U) The FRS denied registration to sixteen political parties. Among them:

- the Republican Party of Russia (RPR)
- the Social Democratic Party (founded by Mikhail Gorbachev)
- the Eurasian Union
- the Popular Republican Party
- the Union of People for Education and Science (SLON)
- the Party for the Development of the Regions, "Nature and Society"

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- the National Conservative Party of Russia
- the Russian United Industrial Party

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Future of Unregistered Parties  
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¶6. (U) Only one of the sixteen parties, the Russian United Industrial Party, has to date announced its intention to dissolve, and merge its membership with that of the pro-Kremlin party United Russia. FRS Acting Director for Political Party and NGO Affairs Galina Fokina told a press conference October 26 that the unregistered parties will soon be formally notified of their failure to qualify. The parties may appeal the FRS's decision in writing. The FRS has one month to reply, after which the party, if dissatisfied, can appeal to the courts. A party cannot be considered de-registered until the legal appeals process has run its course.

¶7. (SBU) Among those parties denied registration by the FRS, SLON's Chairman Vyacheslav Igrunov told us that he believed his party could not successfully contest the FRS's decision. Igrunov also saw no prospective merger partners. SLON had considered merging with the Russian Party of Life, Igrunov said, but in the end found the organization "too bureaucratic" for its liking. The only path left to it, Igrunov said, was to dissolve.

¶8. (SBU) Pavel Zараfulin, assistant to Vyacheslav Dugin of the Eurasian Union, told us that, in fact, his party had ceased to exist some time ago, and had transformed itself into an NGO, the International Eurasian Union. Closing the Eurasian Union party would be a mere formality, said Zараfulin. RPR Political Council member Dmitriy Vovchuk told us that he understood that Gorbachev's Social Democratic Party, now headed by businessman Vladimir Kishenin, would fold its tent. "Kishenin is tired," Vovchuk said, and wants to devote himself to his business.

¶9. (SBU) Some observers cited as evidence of the political nature of the registration process the fate of minor parties like the United Socialist Party. Political commentator Aleksey Levchenko reported that the United Socialists, headed by President Putin's former judo coach Valeriy Shestov, improbably in Levchenko's view, managed to gather the signatures of 51 thousand members and clear all of other hurdles to registration, although the United Socialists are virtually unknown in Russia.

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Ryzhkov's Republicans  
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¶10. (SBU) RPR Co-Chairman Vladimir Ryzhkov has termed the FRS's decision not to register his RPR "politically driven." The FRS's Fokina contended at her press conference that the RPR's membership totaled only 39,979, and that it had legitimate, regional organizations in only 32 of Russia's regions. Ryzhkov disagreed and, as proof that his party was being singled out for persecution, he alleged that the RPR had taken the FRS to court 23 times in the last 18 months, and won 21 of those cases.

¶11. (C) Dmitriy Vovchuk of the RPR's Political Council October 27 told us he agreed with the FRS that there had been "problems" with the RPS's re-registration packet, although Vovchuk cautioned that the RPR had not yet received a written explanation of the reasons for refusal from the FRS. The RPR's application process had been plagued with technical problems, Vovchuk said. In places on the application where all of the members of the political council were to have signed, only one member signed. As an election technician, Vovchuk understood that some of the 63,892 signatures --at least 8860 to be exact-- submitted by the RPR were "problematic, and there had been problems as well with the RPR's legal address, which had changed in fact, but seemingly not been updated on the re-registration application. Vovchuk described further, unspecified problems in the regions of Vladimir and Murmansk, and in other regions as well. He ascribed some of these problems to the continuing legacy of bad feeling created by an earlier RPR merger with the party "Forward Russia," whose members, Vovchuk said, remain dissatisfied with the role allotted them in the new party.

¶12. (C) Vovchuk agreed with Ryzhkov that the RPR had a history of legal disputes with the FRS. The RPR was contesting earlier FRS decisions that seemed to conflate the law with the registration practices of other political

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parties. Unfortunately, Vovchuk said, the FRS's location in Moscow meant that all decisions were appealed to the city's Taganskiy court, which seemed to support the FRS whatever the merits of the case.

¶13. (C) Per Vovchuk, more serious for the fate of western-oriented democratic parties in Russia than excessive scrutiny from the FRS was the continued rivalries and disarray within their ranks. Before the October 8, nine-region elections, the parties' leaderships had agreed to pool their resources in order to maximize returns in those areas where they might be competitive. In Astrakhan, where the RPR was on the ballot, Yabloko was to have helped in gathering signatures for candidates, and with the campaign itself. "Other than signing one letter," Vovchuk said, Yabloko Astrakhan provided no assistance to RPR's campaign. The regional electoral commission found the signatures Yabloko had gathered for a number of RPR individual-mandate candidates, candidate Aleksandr Podborov among them, to be invalid. Vovchuk had found the signatures "suspicious" when he reviewed them before they were submitted, but his questions produced only indignation among Yabloko Astrakhan members and, against his better judgment, he had allowed them to go forward.

¶14. (C) The parties should know, Vovchuk said, that their applications will be scrutinized, and they should be certain that they are impeccable when submitted. "Instead of 50 thousand signatures, we should have 60 thousand valid signatures," he said. Instead, the work in the regions continues to be sloppy, with parties who command the allegiance of a tiny fraction of the electorate continuing to impede the work of their largely irrelevant rivals. "Who would vote for us?" Vovchuk asked rhetorically. "I wouldn't."

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Comment  
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¶15. (C) The RPR intends to contest the FRS's refusal to re-register it in court if necessary, but it seems unlikely that the decision will be reversed. The higher standards for party registration this time around have given those parties with "administrative resources" an advantage in gathering signatures and holding the necessary regional meetings. Still, if Vovchuk is to be believed, crossing the threshold to registration should not be beyond the ability of any party pretending to a national presence, no matter how closely it is scrutinized by the FRS.  
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